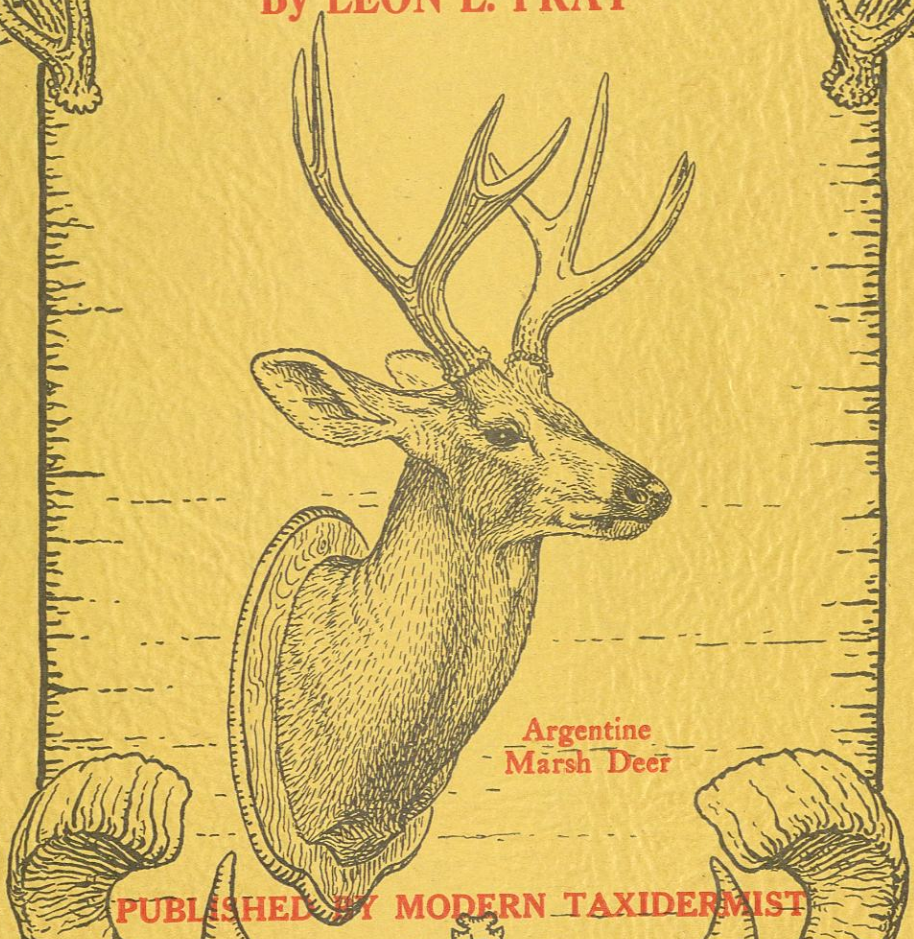
AMERICAN GAME HEAD STUDIES FOR THE TAXIDERMIST

By LEON L. PRAY



Argentine
Marsh Deer

PUBLISHED BY MODERN TAXIDERMIST
Greenfield Center, New York

Kenai Peninsula Moose, Alaska

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INTRODUCTION

With the thought in mind that a collection of American Game Head Studies would be useful in more ways than one in taxidermy studios of our western hemisphere, the following pages have been carefully prepared.

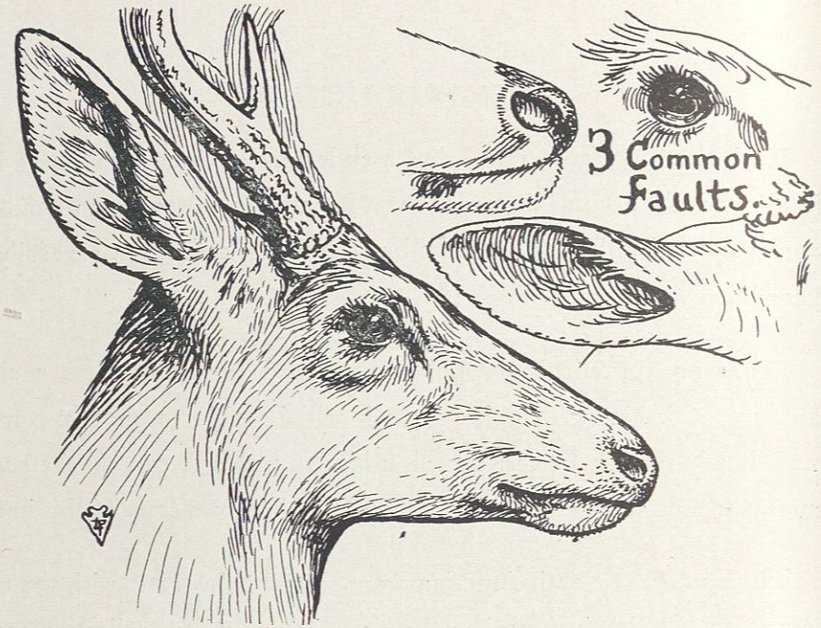
From one practical viewpoint, the taxidermist who has a sizable amount of Virginia deer head work will be able to show pictures of such heads to a customer, allowing him to pick out exactly the style of mount to suit his particular requirement, if he has a copy of this booklet.

The studies of South American game heads illustrate, with the rather large list of North American heads, what a unique collection may be built up from hunting expeditions upon American soil.

Leon L. Pray,

Homewood, Illinois.

May 14, 1940.



Three accurately drawn studies of a Virginia deer's face. Upper right—three faults commonly seen in mounted heads.

A noble Northern Michigan Whitetail Buck.

This study is from one of Carl Akeley's famous mountings. Akeley told the writer that he did not make this deer's neck as large as it actually was because no one would believe the fact.

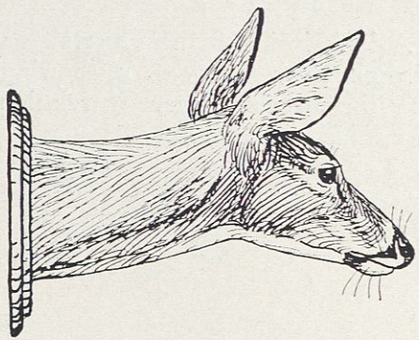
A look inside of a Whitetail or Virginia Buck Deer's neck, showing how the vertebrae curve in relation to outline of the flesh.

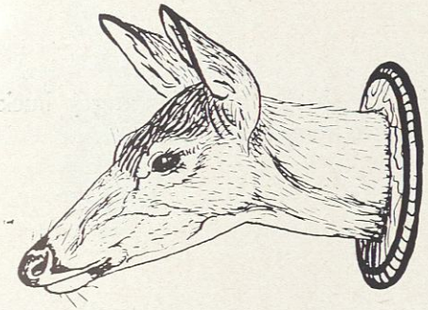
The Michigan Deer heads on this page are also drawn from Akeley mounts.

No other taxidermist has ever succeeded in putting more actual flesh and blood appearance into mounted animal skins.

Following Carl Akeley's leadership many great artists have entered upon a taxidermy career.

Our present day, light weight, hollow manikins had their beginning in the Akeley Studios during the late eighteen hundreds.





Virginia Deer doe heads make pretty mountings.

In most of our states laws protect female deer.

The writer one saw the mounted head of a Michigan doe which had two antlers of one long tine each.

This doe had a large fawn with her when she was shot.

Such female freaks appear to be rare.

At the left is a study of a short neck mount. Such a head has a better appearance with the ears slanted backward and a little upward, giving a restful appearance.

Two-thirds neck mount. An angry buck blowing and shaking his antlers.

Short neck Virginia doe head. A pleasing "curiosity" pose.

Whole neck, eight-point head, without shoulders. "High alert" pose.

"Animated attention" pose. Nearly whole neck mount. Half and whole neck deer heads suit the makeup of the average small home living-room.

"Alert pause sneak" mount. (The turn of the neck comes right at back of skull, not in a sweeping curve along neck.)

"Noble, high attention" mount. (Back of head may be but a few inches from wall in this striking pose.)

"Amiable attention" mount. (Particularly suited to a tall narrow set of antlers.)

"Hurrying sneak" pose. A deer getting away at a low-going, fast pace.

Small antlers often go with a beautiful, soft gray coat. A whole neck mounting such as this "amiable alert" looks well in a room of limited space.

Half neck, "pausing sneak" mount. This makes a striking pose for either a six-pointer or a large, full-antlered head.

"Uncertain alert" pose with turned head and half neck.

"Distant listening" mount. (Suitable for any size head.)

"Pausing sneak" mount. A catchy, bright-eyed pose. (Whole neck, without shoulders.)

Pose of buck momentarily lifting head for observation while drinking. (Three-quarters neck mount.)

"Casual observation" pose. Whole neck but no shoulders.

"High alert, uncertain" pose. A "pedestal" mount suitable for mantel, library table, bookcase, etc.

"Hounds in the distance." Eyes rolling, nostrils testing the wind, ears tense. Two-thirds neck mount.

"Alert sneak" mount. Pausing in thick brush to watch a distant figure. (Half neck makes a good backing for this fetching head.)

Indifferent, half-alert pose. Ears loose and easy, eyes round and inquisitive. (Whole neck mount.)

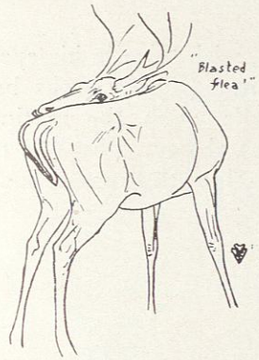
"At ease" pose, whole neck mount. A heavy-necked old timer. A grandfather buck from Tensas Parish, Louisiana. (Some southern bucks grow plenty big.)

"Careless, at ease" pose. Either half or whole neck mount.

"Alert sneak" mount. Whole neck, including first bulge of shoulders.

"Hunter in view" pose. A heavy, wise, old buck, hidden from view and eyeing his adversary.

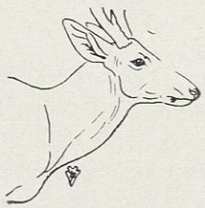
Studies sketched from living deer. (Front view of a buck Virginia deer with neck at nearly full swell. With neck at full swell the head does not come up so high.)



Deer licking at a flea on his hip. (Study for full figure mount.)

Drinking deer, pausing to listen. (A pleasing pose for an advertising display window mounting.)

Resting deer, chewing cud. (A pose suitable to be included in a group but tiresome if done in a single head mount.)

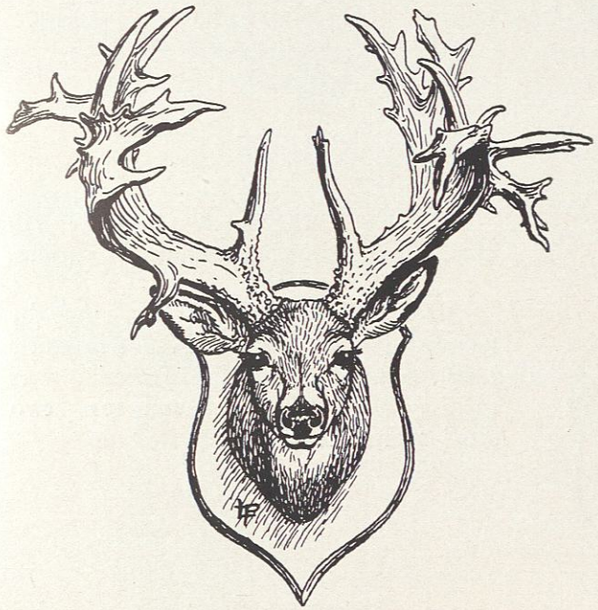


A resting deer in attitude just after swallowing cud. (Another good group pose.)

A proud young buck, with "fire in his eye" at beginning of the rut. (Tame bucks become unreasoning devils when the mating season arrives.) Takes ability to be able to put the blank, wild stare into the eyes of such a buck's head.

An old buck with teeth well worn shows a smaller chin than he had when in his youthful prime. Most old deer heads are mounted with the chins as full as those of younger deer.

Study of a full shoulder mount, which balances the huge, spreading antlers of this Adirondack buck.



Study of a heavy, freak-antlered deer, mounted with short neck, sneak pose. In this mounting the brown oak shield is the artistic counterbalance for the massive antlers.

Both mounts by Joseph Bruchac.

A graceful-antlered freak head from Tensas Parish, Louisiana. Mounted by Leon L. Pray.

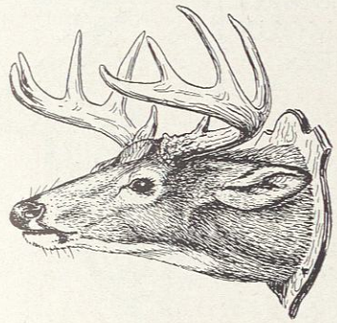
Freak deer heads are often beautiful, making pleasing turned head mounts.

A running Virginia doe. Stretched out and going like a streak.

A "threatening buck" mount. An ideal set of Louisiana whitetail antlers.

Often such beautiful crowns may be seen lying in the dirt of a Negro hunter's yard, in the deep South. This pair was such a "pick-up" purchased for "two bits" from the owner.

A tall-crowned Northern Michigan head. The writer bought this grand head from a meat market in his home town in 1898 for two dollars and a half. ("Ears back, noble alert" pose is a favorite with me.)



A "sneak" mount by Carl Akeley, about 1903. Akeley did the "livest" looking deer heads that it has been my pleasure to see. His African big game groups in Field Museum are classics of natural expression.

Shoulder mount, "noble alert" Adirondack deer with a crown that would be hard to beat.

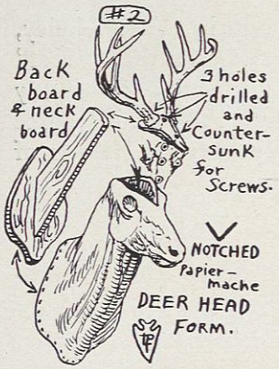
Study of a finished deer head.

Back view of left turn head.

Avoid these faults when making head forms.

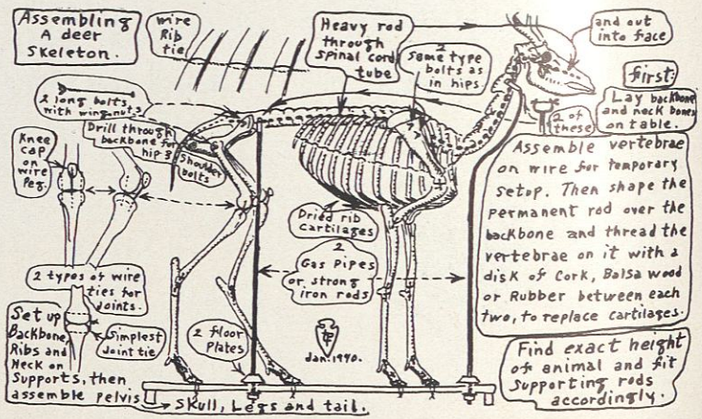
One method of setting antlers on hollow form.

A PAGE OF ASSORTED DEER HEAD MOUNTING STUDIES.



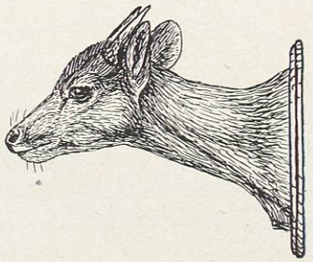
Drawings showing steps in assembling head form, backboard and antlers.

Set-up of a deer skeleton.


Assembling A deer Skeleton.
Wire Rib tie
Heavy rod through spinal cord tube
2 same type bolts as in hips
and out into face
First Lay backbone and neck bones on table.
2 of these
2 long bolts with wing nuts
Drill through backbone for hip & shoulder bolts
Knee cap on wire peg
Assemble vertebrae on wire for temporary setup. Then shape the permanent rod over the backbone and thread the vertebrae on it with a disk of Cork, Balsa wood or Rubber between each two, to replace cartilages.
Dried rib cartilages
2 Gas Pipes or strong iron rods
2 types of wire ties for joints.
Set up Backbone Ribs and Neck on Supports, then assemble pelvis
Simplest joint tie
2 floor Plates
Jan. 1940.
Find exact height of animal and fit supporting rods accordingly.
Skull, Legs and tail.

Argentine Guemul.

(A mountain deer.)



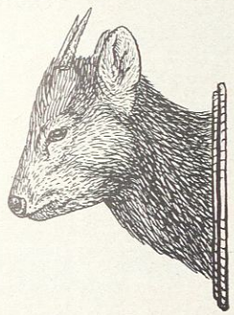
Brocket. (A small brush deer.)

(See cover for marsh deer head.)

Pampas deer.
(A deer of the grassy plains.)

CAREFUL STUDIES OF SOUTH AMERICAN DEER HEADS.

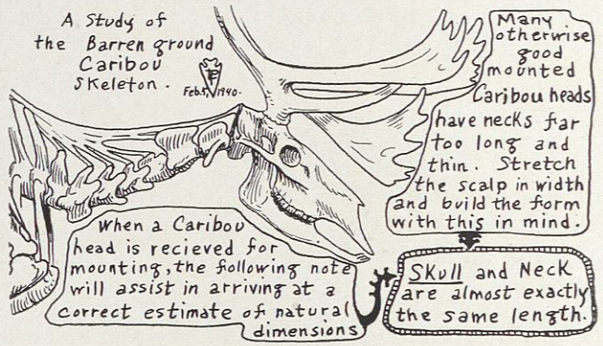
The Guemul is called by collectors the world's loveliest deer. They have a soft, silky-textured, deep coat of silvery gray, of exquisite shadings. Two simple points make up the characteristic antlers. Name pronounced "waymool."



Pudu.
(A tiny deer that resembles the dik-dik antelopes of Africa.)

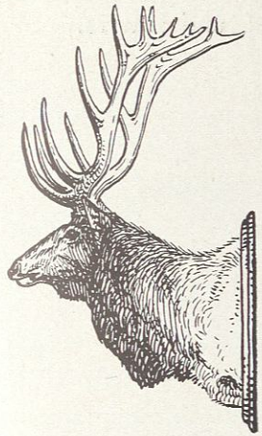
Woodland Caribou. This deer retains its antlers only until the rutting season is finished, then goes through the winter shorn of its noble crown.

Compare this head of a domesticated Reindeer with the Caribou. Reindeer come in many colors, including solid black and pure white. An introduced species, known only in domestication. Produces some huge racks of antlers.


A Study of the Barren ground Caribou Skeleton.
Many otherwise good mounted Caribou heads have necks far too long and thin. Stretch the scalp in width and build the form with this in mind.
When a Caribou head is recieved for mounting, the following note will assist in arriving at a correct estimate of natural dimensions
Skull and Neck are almost exactly the same length.

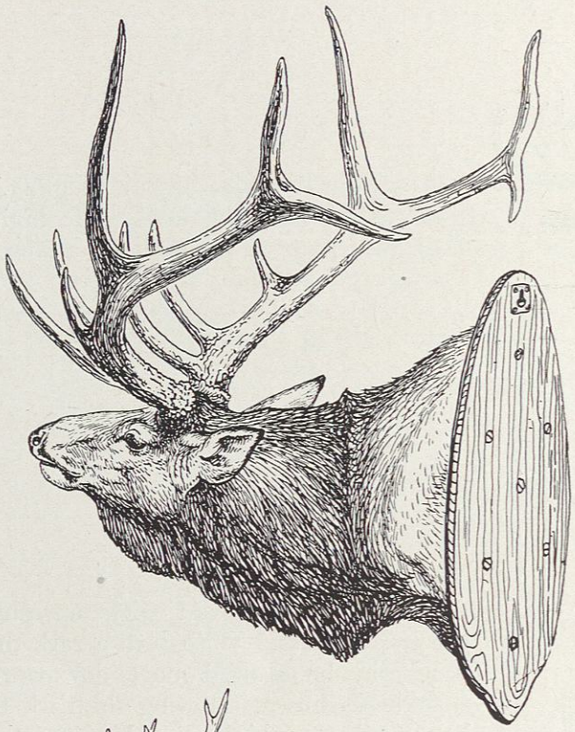
Study of Woodland Caribou skeleton. (Neck and skull are the same length.)

American Elk whistling or "bugling." Sometimes raises the head quite high, with nose pointed skyward on a sharp slant in this action.



American Elk head with upright-growing antlers. With such a rack the nose may be slanted more downward than here shown, allowing the neck to be raised at a higher angle from the shoulders.

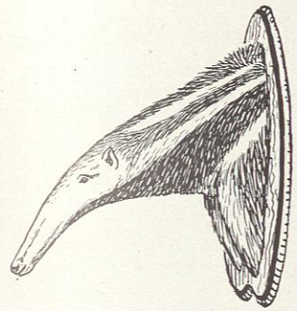
The head of a young bull Elk with small antlers allows a mount to be made with full, high-flung action of the wild, savage challenge.



A bull American Elk head mounted in the action of the animal coming down a steep mountain slope. (This style of mount gives the utmost grace to every line of head, neck and antlers.)

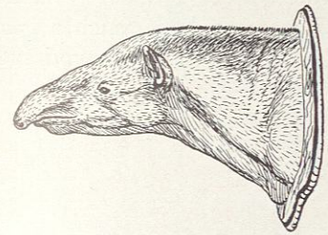
Alaskan Caribou of the mountainous barrens. Antlers of this species grow to almost unbelievable dimensions. This is the largest of all Caribou.

A young bull Elk with full turned head. Pose most suitable for a corner. Two heads mounted for opposite corners make a grand flanking for a large desk or a fireplace built into the end of a long room.

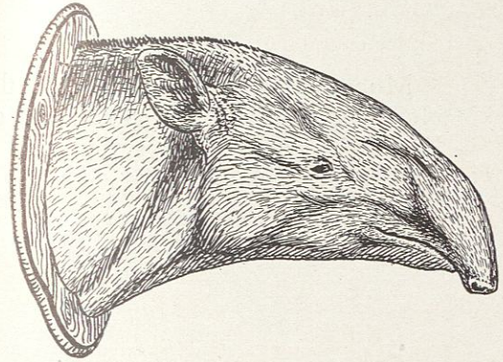


The Giant Anteater's head and shoulders produce the absolute in weirdness over all American mammal forms.

This head requires the front of the mighty forearms to balance the long drooping head and neck.



There are three species of Tapirs in Central and South America, all gray or blackish in color, all pony-like in general appearance.



Tapir heads look well with either half neck or full neck and fore-shoulders.

Front shoulder view of young bull Elk head, mounted for corner-of-room situation. (Turn of head comes at juncture of head with neck, not in a curve all along neck.)

Pedestal mounting of large American Elk. In the center of a sportsman's large den, set at natural height of the animal on a rich base, such a game head is a real "knockout." May be viewed from all angles.

Moose head of eastern Canada. Not so grand as the patriarch of Kenai Peninsula, Alaska, but still a wonderful trophy.

Mule-deer doe head. The ears and the horseshoe marking on this deer's forehead are distinctly decorative.

A typical Mule-deer head with ten regular points. (Full shoulder, left turn mounting.)

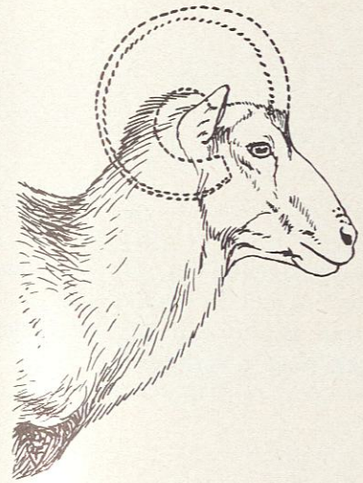
Mule-deer "at gaze." A grazing deer, lifting his head for safety observation.

(Unusual cup-topped antlers.)

An angry Mule-deer buck with danger flashing from his rolling eyes. (Two-thirds neck mount.)

A grand old warrior of the Colorado hills. Neck at full swell. Fiery, wild light in bloodshot eyes. (*Expression* and *character* should be the inspiration in more taxidermy work.)

An old Wyoming Bighorn ram. An old Bighorn sheep has shoulders like a miniature draft-horse.

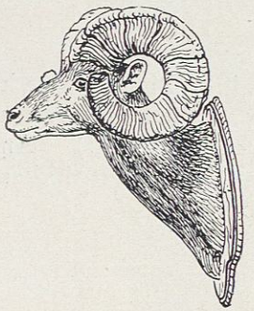


His neck appears short with the hair covering the anatomy. When the skin is removed from a large ram the rather small neck is a surprise to the observer.

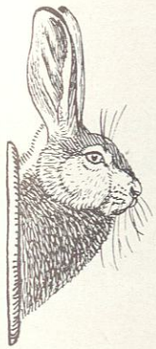
Study of a northern Bighorn's neck in relation to the outline of his winter coat. (A six-year-old ram.) An old ram would have somewhat thicker neck conformation.

Stone's Black Sheep of Alaska. The horns of this northern Bighorn have the most regal spread of any American sheep.

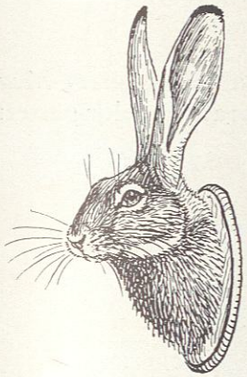
Dalls' White Alaskan Sheep. An albino in appearance but not in reality, this pure white mountain Bighorn has golden eyes and blue-black nose and hoofs.



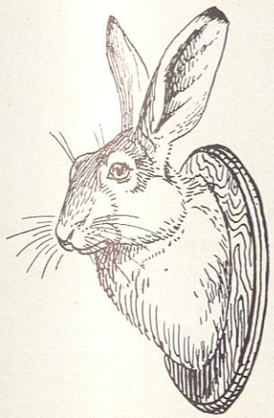
Sonora Bighorn from Mexico. The skinniest appearing of our wild sheep. His hair is short, thin and close-fitting, making his horns appear enormous in proportion.



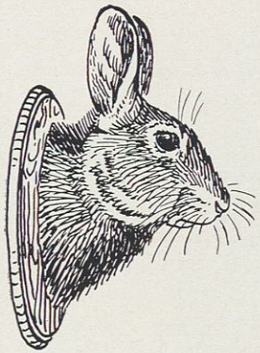
A mounted head of the western black-tailed Jack rabbit.



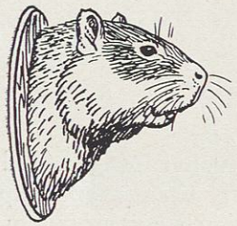
Study of head of the angular, long-geared California Jack rabbit. A twenty-foot leap from a standing start is a cinch for this bunny.



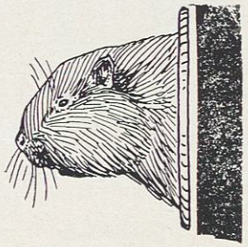
Kansas prairie hare in winter coat. These snowy "Jacks," with gray or brownish face-shading and black-tipped ears make beautiful mounted heads.



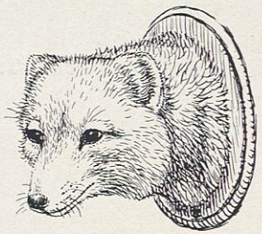
The common cottontail makes a cute little game head mount. It takes a neat bit of taxidermy work to shape up his familiar features.



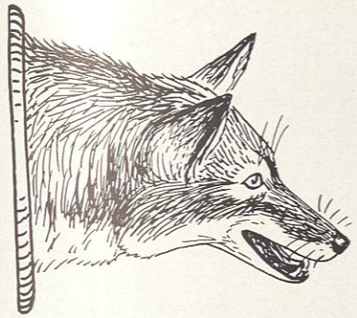
The Mountain "Whistler" or hoary Marmot has rather a decorative color-pattern on his face.



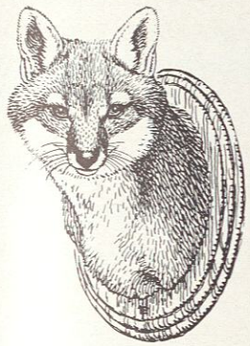
When you mount a Beaver head don't have his jaws set open like a pair of ice tongs. His long, flexible, divided upper lips nearly cover the big, brown teeth.



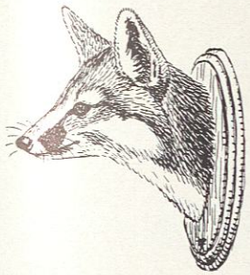
The weasel-like face of an Arctic Fox makes a real curio among American game heads.



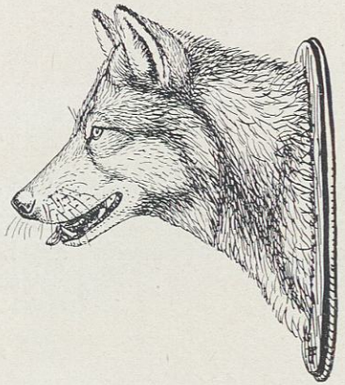
Red Fox, with his sly leer makes a fetching, decorative wall ornament. Give him a "smile" but never a "snarl."



Gray Fox is as pretty as a kitten. His color pattern is decorative to a high degree. Takes a little skill in adjusting.



Side view of Gray Fox with short neck mounting.



Lobo, the Timber Wolf. Here is a specimen to gratify the taxidermist who likes to bring out expression in a wild creature's face.

And the Coyote, or Prairie Wolf, has even a craftier physiognomy than Red Fox. A "warning pose" mounting.

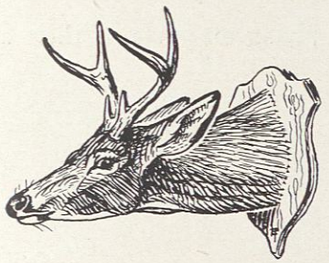
A Coyote at gaze, with tip of tongue just showing behind dagger teeth, has all the beguiling looks of a melodrama villain. His ears are one and a half times the size of those of Lobo.

THE SUBJECT OF SUITABLE SHIELDS

Game heads, for the most part, are seen mounted upon shields patterned somewhat after ancient heraldic forms.

It has seemed to me that almost any head could have a far better appearance lent to it by the shield upon which it is permanently mounted being shaped to the outline of base of neck or shoulders. A double margin with a heavy black "beading" between will give an appearance of richness and help to actually *frame* the head like a picture. I have shown a number of heads in this series mounted on such shields. Sometimes a gilt beading might replace the black with rather a complimentary effect on the mounted head. Color of wood should be considered to set off color and pattern of subject to be placed upon the shield. This is a phase of game head preparation that merits a high degree of artistic thought.

Leon L. Pray.



North American Prongbuck.

The mounted head of a Prongbuck has a regal beauty, scarcely to be matched by any other game head of the world.

This ruminant has the curious distinction of shedding its hollow horns annually from bony cores but not before the new, hairy-grained horns have started under the old sheath.

The Prongbuck formerly ranged over the great plains, from the Mississippi to the Rockies and from well up in Canada south into Mexico.

Under protections Prongbucks are multiplying on parts of their ancient range.

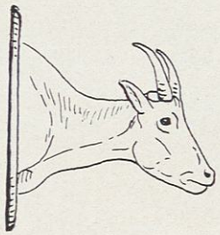
The rich coloring of the American Prongbuck places it in the class of dainty and decorative game animals.

Heads of this species are highly prized by fortunate owners.

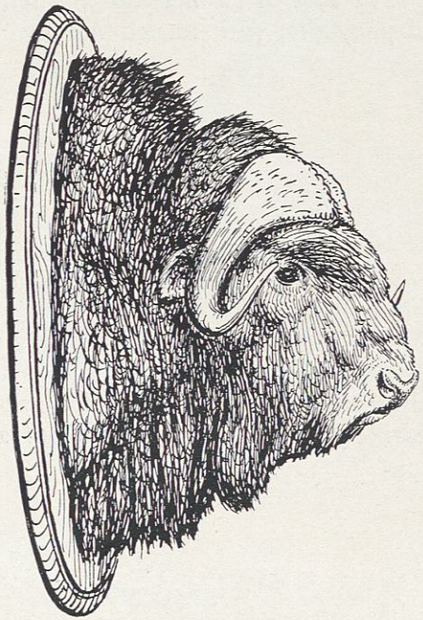
Even the hornless female is a thing of beauty. The ears of Prongbucks are delicate and pony-like, with turned-in tips.

To adjust the beautiful white neck markings accurately tests the patient care of a taxidermist.

The White Rocky Mountain "Goat," which is no goat at all but a relative of the Asiatic Takin, is an animal in which the hair outline bears no resemblance to the outline of anatomy.



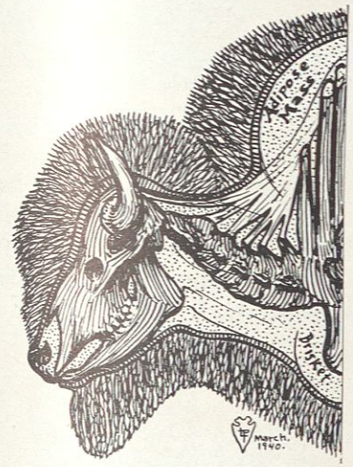
The White "Goat" with his hide removed bears a strong resemblance to a miniature Bison. Here is how this animal looks, minus hair.



The Arctic Musk Ox furnishes a sculptural quality of game head. His hair-masses would delight a modeller of heroic animal figures. His skull and horns weigh as much as a like amount of cast iron.

The American Bison is another animal for a grand sculpturesque game head. Some ranch-bred specimens are still available in the United States. Quite a number of Canadian Woods Bison are shot annually to keep the herds in proper condition.

Here is the head of the big beard bull in Field Museum's famous group, adapted as a wall mounting. This bull has a full beard, which is rare on ranch-raised specimens which drink from freezing troughs in corrals and break their beards off.

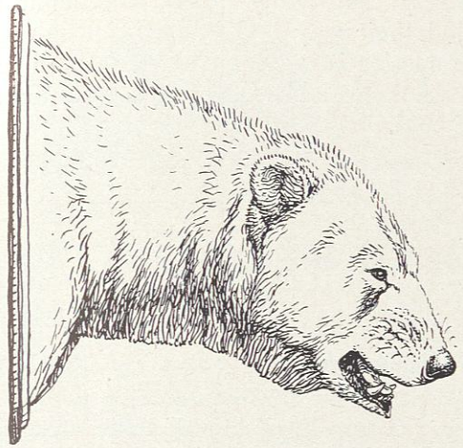


A study of the Bison's shoulders, neck and head in "shadow view" gives an idea of how different the flesh outline is from the hair. An old bull's forehead hide is of considerable thickness.

A study of a North American Black Bear head with full shoulder mounting. Let us give our bear heads a playful, open-mouth expression rather than a ferocious snarl. The observer soon tires of a snarling animal's countenance.

"Ephraim," the Rocky Mountain Grizzly Bear, is a peace-loving fellow, when left alone to go his way. His features, with a happy, lolling-dog expression on them are pleasant to behold.

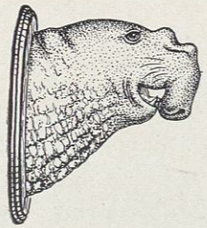
Side view of Grizzly head with plain neck mounting. Bear heads look far better with full shoulders to balance the burly features.



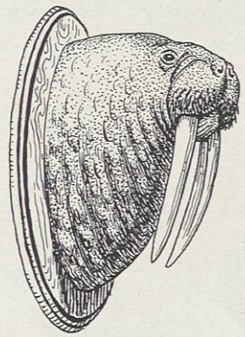
The weird, lemon yellow head of an old male Polar Bear makes a rich and grand trophy. Male Polar Bear skins are commonly bleached white when made up, thus spoiling the best part of their natural beauty. Females are naturally whiter than the males.

The Kodiak Bear is the giant of the Ursine world. His features are even more sculpturesque than those of the Grizzly.

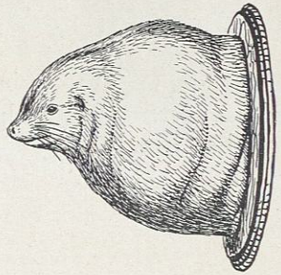
A head that is rarely seen in a collection is that of the South American Spectacled Bear. A most curious and wonderfully marked animal, from the mountains below the Equator in Equador.



It is unlikely that many heads of Elephant Seals will find their way into private collections. This Pacific species is under strict protection on Guadelupe. A huge, unwieldy and mostly helpless kind of seal.



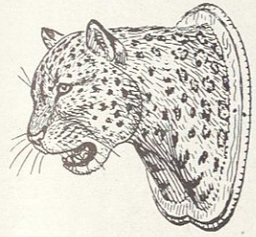
The Pacific Walrus, (also the Atlantic species), is killed in considerable numbers annually. Their huge heads make striking mounted trophies.



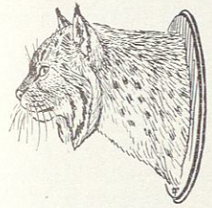
The head and neck of an old male Steller's Sea-lion looks very well with mouth either open or closed. Such a neck no other animal ever grew!

Tennessee appears to be producing a real "Hawg" nowadays in the shape of Russian Wild Boars, with a limited bag taken annually by specially licensed hunters. And do the old Boars' heads make grand trophies!

Cat heads look by far the best when mounted with full front shoulder form. The southwestern Ocelot is a handsome little Tabby.



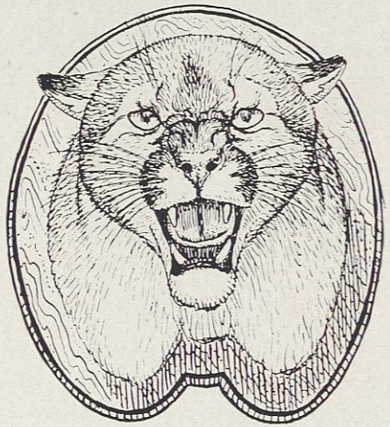
An old Jaguar tom is hard to beat for sheer, downright, gorgeous beauty. Don't give his face a scrappy snarl, just drop his jaw a little and put a contemplative expression in his eyes.



The Bob-cat varies in color as much as any wild creature ever does. When mounting Bob-cat heads, try one occasionally with his kindly-looking kitty features relaxed.

When mounting one with open mouth, see if a yowling expression is not more pleasing than a straining snarl that obliterates all view of the rest of the trophy's charm.

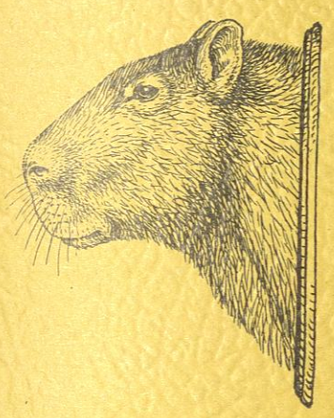
The Canadian Lynx has a weird, spectacular beauty that needs no fighting "snarl" to attract attention. His decorative, bifurcated "chops" usually droop as here shown. This study is of the Lynx in summer pelage.



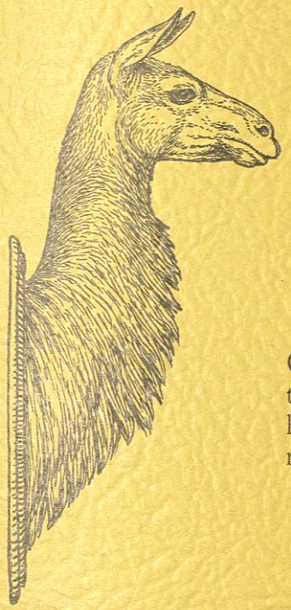
Go ahead and make the "deer-slayer" snarl mightily if you will but put the wrinkles on top of his nose, not on the sides. The whisker-seats do not wrinkle when a Cougar snarls.

Brother Raccoon has decorative features, with a highwayman's mask drawn over his eyes. Give him full shoulder mounting on a soft-brown, wood shield.

Back in South America once more we find several curiosities. Many kinds of Agoutis are found in the lowlands.



The tiny Guinea "pigs" giant cousin is the Capybara, which lives along tropical watercourses and swims and dives in the same manner as the African Hippopotamus.



In South America, on the Pampas of Argentina, dwells a "living fossil" in the shape of the Guanaco or American Camel. This is probably the ancestor of all the domesticated Llamas, Alpacas, etc., that have labored or produced meat and wool for man through centuries of the past.

THE END.

READERS OF THIS BOOKLET TAKE NOTICE

There is scarcely a species of American game animal, large or small, that does not furnish a subject of delight to the collector of mounted game heads.

If enough interest is shown in the series of game heads herein presented the author offers to contribute studies of heads of the fur-bearers, from weasel to wolverine and any other subjects that bona fide subscribers may request, to be printed from time to time in the pages of "Modern Taxidermist Magazine."

Also he will be glad to draw for "Modern Taxidermist" publication any particular game head poses of any species in the world asked for by subscribing members of "Modern Taxidermist's" large family.

Leon L. Pray.